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SUBJECT: MAURITANIA: AMBASSADOR BOULWARE'S CONSULTATIONS  
IN PARIS (NOVEMBER 19)

REF: BANGUI 286

11. (C) SUMMARY: French officials meeting with U.S. Ambassador to Mauritania Mark Boulware in Paris on November 19 hailed Mauritania's transition to democracy, which the French said they would tout as an example to other African countries and use to justify rewarding Mauritania for its good behavior. At the same time, the French noted Mauritania's fragile and vulnerable state, especially with respect to its porous coast and borders, increased drug smuggling and illegal migration, and the possibility of terrorist and Tuareg incursions in northern Mauritania. Our French interlocutors hoped that Mauritania, with assistance from outside partners, could engage in sustained economic development, which would relieve possibly debilitating pressures and avoid civil unrest. President Sarkozy has developed a personal interest in Mauritania and wants to promote Mauritania during the EU Summit in Portugal December 8-9. The French noted their plans to host a donors, conference on Mauritania in Paris December 4-6, which Ambassador Boulware said the U.S. planned to attend. Ambassador Boulware stressed similar USG goals for Mauritania and noted the general convergence of USG and French policies. Our contact at the Presidency said that Sarkozy had developed a dislike for African Union Commission Chairman Konare, based on his perceived anti-Western stance on a number of fronts. This contact also noted friction Chinese immigrants to Angola were beginning to provoke there. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) Mark Boulware, newly confirmed Ambassador to Mauritania, on November 19 met with MFA DAS-equivalent for West Africa Christine Fages and Mauritania desk officer Sophie Villette, and, separately, with Romain Serman, one of the AF Advisors at the French Presidency.

Meeting at MFA

13. (C) While lauding Mauritania's continuing success in transitioning to democracy, DAS-equivalent Fages said that Mauritania's situation was "delicate." She noted the recent successful visit of President Abdallahi and France's desire to send a positive signal in recognizing Mauritania's transition to democracy, which France very much wanted to see continue. Fages underscored the need for economic reforms,

and at several points noted that rising prices in basic goods, including food and petroleum products, could stress Mauritania's social fabric, even to the point of provoking social unrest. This, she said, required encouragement of economic reform, particularly in the private sector. Fages noted that France would host a donors' conference on Mauritania in Paris December 4-6, which Ambassador Boulware said the U.S. was planning to attend.

¶4. (C) Fages discussed at some length Mauritania's vulnerabilities, focusing on its poorly secured borders and coastline, which made illegal trafficking of all kinds easier. She expressed special concern about the growth in drug smuggling and illegal migration, with Mauritania an increasingly important transit point for South American drugs and a point of exit for Africans from many countries seeking clandestine entry into Europe. The relatively uncontrolled desert regions were a problem as well, with local Salafist elements with links to al-Qaida posing a threat. Fages also said that Tuareg groups could also cause trouble in northern and eastern Mauritania, although they (along with the groups linked to al-Qaida) were not yet causing the same problems in Mauritania that they were causing in neighboring Mali and Niger. Nonetheless, border security needed to be improved, as well as maritime security. Mauritania was porous in many respects, which made it a tempting locus for criminals and terrorists. Ambassador Boulware agreed with Fages's general assessment, and noted Mauritania's inclusion in the USG's Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, along with possible increased USG financial support in this area. Ambassador Boulware added that USAID would soon open an office in Nouakchott, which would facilitate U.S. economic and development support for Mauritania. The U.S. would place

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emphasis, among other things, on working with Mauritania's youth, in an effort to increase the likelihood of their becoming productive members of society and less vulnerable to the temptations of criminal or terrorist groups. Fages agreed that this was a needed effort.

¶5. (C) Fages said that Mauritania also had to be considered from a regional perspective, as many of its problems were regional in nature. She found some merit in Mali's call for a regional conference of Sahel countries, where common problems could be addressed by all concerned parties. Maritime controls for Mauritania, she noted, would only be effective if Senegal were included as well. She said that France was quite willing to coordinate efforts with the U.S. in these areas. She said that France was in the process of authorizing the transfer of two maritime patrol craft to Mauritania to improve maritime controls.

¶6. (C) It was also important, Fages observed, for Mauritania and Senegal to work together to improve relations, seriously weakened since the 1989 rupture. She noted especially the sensitive issue of allowing Mauritanian refugees in Senegal to return, which was a complex matter in view of old and conflicting property claims and the like. Ambassador Boulware said that the U.S. was prepared to provide USD 500,000 to support refugee return; Fages noted a possible French contribution of 250,000 Euros (about USD 370,000). She said that Mauritania needed to avoid putting returned refugees into "ghettos."

Meeting at Presidency  
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¶7. (C) While making many of the same points that Fages made, Romain Serman, one of President Sarkozy's AF Advisors, emphasized the importance France placed politically on Mauritania as a country that had managed, so far, a successful democratic transition. He said that France very much wanted to use Mauritania as a symbol to other African nations of how to go about making democratic transitions and reforms. He stated that one of Sarkozy's principles was to "reward the good and punish the bad," and that in France's

view Mauritania was one of the "good" and would be rewarded. He noted President Abdallahi's recent visit to Paris (see October 30 Paris Points), during which France and Mauritania signed a Partnership Framework Agreement (the standard document France now uses to set forth its economic and development assistance program over a five-year period with a partner country). Originally, France planned to provide Mauritania with 96 million Euros (about USD 142 million) to be used for water, education, good governance, French-language promotion, and research projects. At the last minute, Sarkozy ordered that the figure be increased, as part of France's "reward" to Mauritania. (NOTE: Serman did not provide a final figure. END NOTE.)

¶18. (C) Moreover, Sarkozy found that Abdallahi was not a good "public salesman" for Mauritania and that the GOM lacked public relations skills to present itself in the most favorable light to potential donors or investors. So, Serman said, Sarkozy told Abdallahi that "we'll do it for you." Serman said that this would take the form of Sarkozy's praising Mauritania at the EU Summit in Portugal December 8-9. During his address, Sarkozy plans to hail Mauritania's democratic transition and encourage EU partners to consider assistance programs for Mauritania. Ambassador Boulware informed Serman of Mauritania's standing within the MCC process, noting he was cautiously optimistic that Mauritania would soon be placed in the "threshold" category, which would yield immediate new assistance and pave the way for full MCC status.

¶19. (C) One area of disagreement between France and Mauritania concerned Mauritania's desire to be part of the Mediterranean Union concept that Sarkozy had been trying to promote. Serman said that France would not support full membership in such a Union, noting that Munich was closer to the Mediterranean than Nouakchott, that it would make no sense to allow Germany into a Mediterranean Union, and that

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Mauritania should not expect full membership. However, he said that Mauritania could become an observer should such a Union take shape.

¶10. (C) Serman, providing a broader view of France's Africa policies, discussed a number of topics other than Mauritania.

In the context of the difficulties in raising contributions for UNAMID in Sudan and the EU-UN mission in Chad and the Central African Republic, Serman noted that Sarkozy had developed an antipathy for African Union Commission Chairman Konare. Sarkozy did not like Konare's apparent policy of equating AU or African "ownership" of an issue to mean the exclusion of non-Africans, in, for example, the case of Konare's preference that peacekeepers for missions in African countries be "100 percent African." Sarkozy also did not like Konare's reluctance to support placing strict and transparent controls over how aid provided to African countries by donors such as France would be monitored, to allow for accountability and to avoid a corrupt siphoning off of assistance. Serman was quite firm in setting forth Sarkozy's distaste for Konare.

¶11. (C) In commenting on Mauritania's "good" behavior, Serman noted the C.A.R. as an example of "bad" behavior, with respect to attempts to force French companies (e.g., Total and Areva) to pay extravagant fees that were really no more than bribes. He said that such behavior was not going unnoticed by the GOF and implied that it would count against countries such as the C.A.R. down the road. (NOTE: Our impression of current GOF attitudes towards the C.A.R. is consistent with the views contained in reftel, particularly with respect to the emphasis Serman placed on Sarkozy's intention to "reward the good and punish the bad." Ambassador Boulware met with Serman at the Presidency the same day that Bozize had his notably frosty meeting with Sarkozy. END NOTE.)

¶12. (C) Finally, Serman noted the growing, and increasingly problematic, Chinese diaspora in Africa, citing the case of Angola. He said that there were now some 50,000 Chinese in Angola who were offering "no collateral benefits" to Angolans, who were tiring of big Chinese resource-oriented projects that were not adding much to the Angolan economy in terms of jobs for locals or technology transfer. Instead, Chinese of all levels of education and ability were arriving in Angola and displacing small merchants and even the Syrian and Lebanese families who had long done business there and elsewhere in Africa. Serman suggested that the presence of these Chinese could cause social problems in Angola and in other parts of Africa, and that this could lead Angolans and other Africans to view more favorably their older and more familiar traditional partners, such as France.

¶13. (U) Ambassador Boulware has cleared this message.

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